

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS

Statement of

Dr. Joseph J. Jen, Under Secretary

For the House Subcommittees on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development, and  
Research and General Farm Commodities and Risk Management

Mr. Chairmen, members of the Subcommittees, it is my pleasure to appear before you to discuss the issue of soybean rust and represent the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area agencies of the USDA.

REE agencies are at the center of the research system, supporting the food and agricultural sector. They have a proud history over many decades of finding solutions to the challenges confronting farmers, ranchers, and others involved in agriculture, resulting in a high return on the Federal investment to our Nation, which enjoys a plentiful, affordable, and safe food supply. This remarkable history of success continues today, yielding new knowledge, technologies, statistics, and analysis for effectively addressing today's problems and building the scientific and technological foundation for addressing tomorrow's problems and opportunities.

A most notable example of addressing today's problems relates to the recent arrival of soybean rust on our shores. For some time scientists have been saying that this

plant disease would inevitably arrive in the U.S., carried by winds from South America where the disease has been residing for several years. REE agencies, their partners in other USDA agencies, the research and scientific community, State departments of agriculture, and soybean industry organizations have been preparing for this anticipated event that became a reality last November in Louisiana. There have been 29 confirmed cases in nine States in 2004, and a few cases on kudzu in Florida so far in 2005.

Effective management and control of soybean rust relies on early detection, correct identification, and proper and timely application of fungicides. Starting in 1998, REE agencies have played a critical leadership role with the ultimate goal of providing producers with effective disease management options.

For example, ARS scientists have developed a real-time rapid detection test that has been adopted by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). It will provide a quick, easy and accurate means to detect soybean rust as part of a national surveillance system. Over 20,000 soybean lines from the USDA Soybean Germplasm Collection at Urbana have been evaluated in a preliminary screening, none of which exhibits broad spectrum resistance. Among these soybean lines, 800 commercial quality lines are under further study in intermediate trials.

CSREES has been at the forefront of training first detectors. In June of 2004, a regional soybean rust teleconference attracted nearly 1,000 participants who grow or service nine million acres of soybeans. CSREES has also been instrumental in

establishing a National Plant Diagnostic Network of strategically located university-based laboratories that support APHIS laboratories, facilitating rapid and accurate detection. Additionally, through CSREES support of system extension grants, Cooperative Extension continues to play a vital role in getting the word out to farmers and other stakeholders in our soybean producing states.

In September 2004, ERS published an article on the economic risks of soybean rust in the U.S. in its publication, *Amber Waves*. The article indicated that the economic effects of the pathogen's entry into the U.S. could vary considerably, depending on growing conditions, the severity and spread of the disease, and producers' responses. This analysis presented policymakers and the soybean industry with information to make more informed decisions in responding to the detection of the soybean rust in 2004.

REE agencies will continue an aggressive and comprehensive soybean rust research and education strategy. The attached addendum provides more detailed information on REE activities to combat soybean rust. I look forward to discussing this issue further with the members of the Subcommittees. Thank you.